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Donald Morris /an analysis

'Operation Splinter Factor' telling it like it wasn't

There is always a market for serious books on foreign affairs, always an interest in clandestine operations. The bulk of such material is produced by actual participants — retired diplomats or officials and the like — or academicians with a broad grasp of the background material.

An occasional journalist, if he is well qualified and has some respect for the rules of evidence, will also make useful historical contributions.

But, from time to time, a writer blunders into the field whose major asset is imagination, whose objective is to present a lurid, spectacular flight of imagination as fact, and whose powers of research, analysis and understanding are either weak or deliberately suppressed.

Such a writer is an English journalist, Stewart Steven, whose latest effusion ("Operation Splinter Factor," 243 pages. New York: Lippincott, \$7.95), is selling briskly at the moment to the same public which made best sellers of "Worlds in Collision", "Chariots of the Gods" and any number of books attacking the Warren Commission or proving the innocence of the Rosenbergs.

Steven hangs his scenario on Allen Dulles, for whom he claims an anti-Communist mentality rarely encountered outside the John Birch Society. Very briefly, in 1949 the Central Intelligence Agency had (with British help) managed to recruit Josef Swiatlo, a high-ranking Polish security official.

Soon, Noel Field, a former American diplomat, was arrested in Prague and imprisoned for several years. Field's wife, his brother and a young girl to whom he was a guardian, entered the Soviet bloc in efforts to negotiate his release. All were arrested and held incommunicado for lengthy prison terms.

Field was a State Department employe from 1925 to the late 1930s, given to far left humanitarian causes in an era when such activity aroused few suspicions. He was in contact with Soviet espionage, but drove his recruiters wild by a capricious independence in what he would and would not do.

During the war, he managed civilian relief activities in Vichy France, making contacts with refugee Communists from all over Europe. He had several OSS contacts, but was in no sense an official of the U.S. government, let alone an intelligence officer.

Field's arrest coincided with Stalin's crackdown on the post-war "nationalist" Communists who were running most of the satellites. This crew was notoriously independent of Moscow's direction, and the Soviets routed them out ruthlessly, replacing them with more amenable puppets.

It is Steven's contention that Dulles fiendishly engineered the crackdown, using Swiatlo to convince Stalin that Field was a dangerous American agent masterminding an anti-Soviet revolt

through his war-time Communist contacts. Dulles's purpose was to have the nationalist leaders replaced by Stalinist henchmen so brutal that the populations would arise and throw out all the Communists.

Aside from the fact Dulles was in private law practice in New York until late 1950 (according to Steven merely a "cover"), it is hard to know where to start. The historical record means nothing to Steven. If facts are useful he uses them, if inconvenient he ignores them and when he can't ignore them he blithely states they weren't so.

Nothing is sourced (except to unnamed officials), and all the names and terminology for organizations and departments are a glorious, inaccurate misspelling mish-mash. No speculation is too ludicrous to toss out as fact. Steven even lays the Korean War at the feet of the non-existent "Operation Splinter Factor." There was no such operation, nor has such a cryptonym ever before been heard by American intelligence officials.

But mentalities that will believe Stalin personally started the Korean War to tighten his grip on the European satellites will believe even swill like this.